

Pathways

The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford | Winter 2023/4 | **FREE**



One direction

The narrow way, the way of Christian faith

PLUS: Grow your church | Praying for peace | Deepening everyday faith



Shalom

Peace is one of the deepest, richest, broadest words in the whole of the Bible. The Hebrew word is shalom (peace-making). Shalom is the inheritance and vocation of every Christian today. It is a shorthand for the whole vision of the kingdom of God: a world where God's will is done on earth as in heaven. It is what we pray for each time we say the Lord's Prayer.

Peace is far more than a truce: an absence of conflict, violence and war. Peace encompasses human flourishing, wellbeing, harmony, lives well lived. Shalom describes the world we long for; the world we pray for Sunday by Sunday; the world each of us is trying to build.

Living in a world of conflict and deep questions is not easy, but Jesus calls us to be channels of peace to each other and to the world. Reconciliation with God and reconciliation one with another; reconciliation for the whole world.

Jesus offers our troubled, weary souls the gift of peace which passes understanding. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God," he says. So how will you pursue all that makes for peace at this time?

The way of love

It is very good to see our annual Lent course, *Come and See*, featured on page 15. In Lent we will be exploring how each of us is called into a deep relationship of love with God, and what it means to love others well.

Whether you're exploring faith for the first time or have been coming to church for many years, *Come and See* offers life-giving reflections before the busyness of each day begins. Do join thousands of others and register for daily reflections in Lent.

Our churches, in every corner of the land, should be places that are safe and loving in a world that can sadly be very dark. Which means that it's the job of all of us in every church to maintain a healthy culture where all can experience God's love and grace. Page 18 is a challenging, but essential, read.

The latest statistics for church attendance were published just as *Pathways* was going to press. Across the Church of England, overall church attendance and participation continues to recover following the pandemic but children's attendance is lower than we would hope. Page 12 features intergenerational worship, and page 21 shows how families can create a space to explore scripture together.

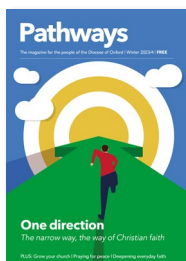
Bishop Steven

Photograph: The rise in antisemitism and hate crime against Muslims is deeply concerning. Together with a group of faith and community leaders we recently held a united vigil for peace in central Oxford to seek peace, build on deep friendships and extend healing in our communities.

Contents



- 4** Around the diocese
- 6** God in the life of...
Ian Maynard
- 8** Step one
Grow your church
- 10** The Bible on...
When to give up
- 12** Opinion
Intergenerational or age-specific?
- 15** For the sake of God's world
Our new learning hub
- 18** Focus on...
Spiritual abuse
- 20** Dwelling in the Word
- 22** A prayer for the people of the Holy Land
- 23** Who told you?



We hope you enjoy reading *Pathways*. Email or write and let us know what you think. Contributor enquiries are welcome.

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Around the diocese

Wikimedia Commons



Supporting parents and carers

Support groups for parents/carers of children with mental ill health, neurodiversity, or special educational needs have been set up by churches in Kidlington and Hampton Poyle. The Development Fund pays towards the professional facilitators to support the families' complex needs. The Revd Felicity Scroggie commented, "I realised we could give them the support they were crying out for."

oxford.anglican.org/200-grants

For regular news and updates, visit the website: oxford.anglican.org/news

Laverne Williams

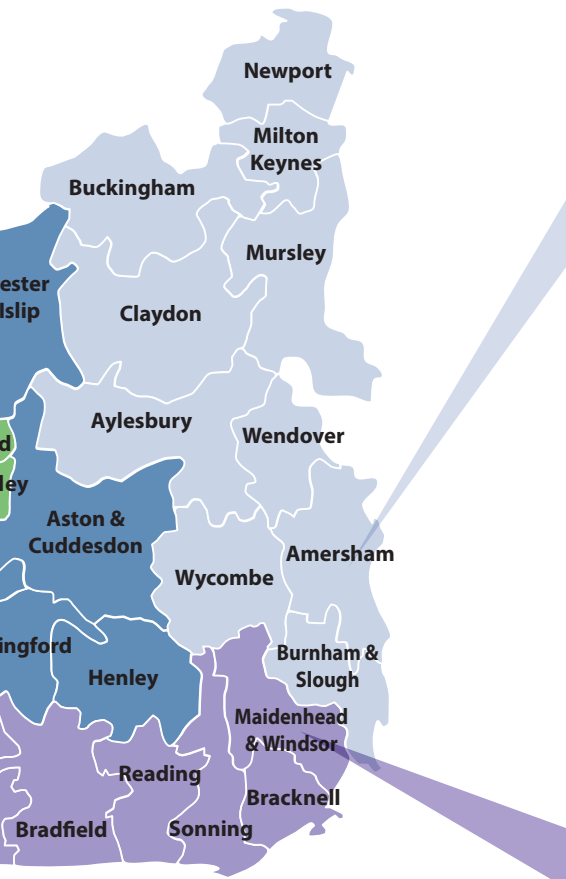


Witney's thriving Christian Union

The Witney Youth Work and Chaplaincy project has developed a thriving Christian Union at the Henry Box School. Based at St Mary's Church and funded by the Development Fund, Laverne Williams has been hard at work connecting with under 18s. "The pupils lead with such passion that I now only need to bring the biscuits," she says.

oxford.anglican.org/youth-work-and-chaplaincy





Alan Jarvis



Going for green

Electric vehicle charge points are a recent innovation at St Michael and All Angels, Amersham-on-the-Hill. Over the last three years, parishioners have implemented various schemes to care for creation. These can be complex projects. One of the requirements of the vehicle charging points was three-phase electricity, to enable a suitably fast charging time.

oxford.anglican.org/going-for-green

Ahmed Akacha/Pexels



Welcoming asylum seekers

When the congregation at All Saints, Maidenhead discovered that there were people at a local hotel seeking asylum, they responded with all kinds of support. English conversation, the occasional meal, the provision of mobile phones all followed. Months later, the congregation were delighted that 17 Iranians were among those confirmed by Bishop Olivia.

oxford.anglican.org/welcoming-asylum-seekers

We're on social media too. Search "Diocese of Oxford" on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

*"... church is like
a TV programme
– you think it just
happens, but
there's a lot of work
that goes into it
beforehand."*



Ian Maynard

Ian Maynard, a churchwarden at St John and St Stephen's Church in Reading, describes faith as his driving force, and it's taken him into some challenging situations.

For over 20 years Ian has been a civil servant. Currently he's taking a sabbatical to follow his passions for volunteering, heavy metal music and cricket.

You'll regularly find Ian volunteering at a safe space for children and their parents – parents they don't live with. "We try to engage and make a difficult situation work as well as possible," Ian explains, "by making it possible for children to see and have a relationship with their non-resident parent."

In a situation that feels like "organised chaos" as up to 15 children arrive, Ian deals with tricky issues such as a child playing with someone from another family rather than bonding with their own parent. Once he has offered help, Ian aims to step into the background so that there can be maximum contact between parent and child.

In a pragmatic but gentle way, Ian works to improve other relationships, too. He was born in Reading, but his family roots are in Barbados. He recognises that historically the Church has not always treated people from other countries well. During lockdown, he gave an online talk on the issue of race and his own experiences.

"You don't want to make people feel they have to carry a guilt about the historic injustices," he says. But his talk got people thinking. "You need to acknowledge racism and discrimination and deal with it. If you don't, there's a danger that the past can catch up with the present and determine some people's reactions. We all need to ensure that it doesn't creep back in."

Attitudes change, and that extends to attitudes about Christianity. Ian reflects, "I am old enough to remember a time when if anyone spoke anything about faith people thought 'Who is this weirdo?'" He sees that now people might state that they don't have a religious belief but what you say is not written off.

Ian has lived out his faith from childhood, but his level of motivation has varied over the years. The life of the missionary Hudson Taylor has been an inspiration since Ian was as young as seven. Hudson Taylor put his trust in God in difficult situations. Following that example, Ian knows it's time to take a step of faith when he senses that there's something God wants him to do. Yet his common-sense approach helps him to look at the options open to him, and what is possible given the commitments he has already made.

In adult life there were years when, looking back, Ian sees he was "coasting along". That changed when other people saw his potential and encouraged him to stand as a churchwarden. He discovered that church is: "like a TV programme – you think it just happens but there's a lot of work that goes into it beforehand." 📺

Words: Nick Clarke and Ruth Hamilton-Jones
Photo: Ed Nix



Do you know someone with unfulfilled potential? If you want to encourage them to use their gifts, this web page might help: oxford.anglican.org/vocations

Value the small and simple

Many are stretched, low on resources and at capacity; remember God is in the seemingly small things.

Keep it simple! God uses what we already have: our gifts, experience and passions. *Gifts for Everyday Faith* will help you to think through where your gifts are strongest: oxford.anglican.org/personal-discipleship-plan

Work as team

We are all called to share Christ's mission in the world, not just the vicar. In fact, one person working alone creates fragility; we are stronger together.

Download *Flourishing Together*, our guide to getting the best out of teamwork: oxford.anglican.org/flourishing-together

Ask for the Holy Spirit

In prayer it is God the Holy Spirit who inspires, envisions and equips.

Knowing that the Holy Spirit equips us, we can be bold.

We are all called to God's service. Also, other people may be more spiritually open than we realise. Many ordinary Christians have discovered that as they faithfully serve God.

Spot God's action

Look for where God is already at work in your community. Then go and join in!

Our Parish Planning Tool facilitates a whole church coming together to discern where God is at work: oxford.anglican.org/parish-planning-tool

Listen and serve

Listen to your community, to others in your church and to God; three-way listening! What is your context for growth?

What needs do you discover as you listen? Could you serve any of those needs? Offer practical service using your gifts and experience. Then find out how your service can grow – enlarge your particular tent!



Grow your church

Throughout history, God has called his people to welcome the stranger and embrace the outsider. Do you want to see your church grow as new people join you?

In our diocese we are witnessing many ways local churches are reaching out to people on the margins and those in need, both tangible and hidden. Across parishes in varied locations, rural, market towns, towns and cities, God is surprising us in new ways.

See, I am doing a new thing

In Isaiah's time, the people of God found themselves in a tough place, exiled and struggling. God calls them back to a close relationship with him and inspires them with a powerful picture of growth for the future (Isaiah 54:1–8). "Enlarge the place of your tent," he encourages them, "and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out".

Growth starts with what the people are familiar with, a tent; a place for family, welcome, business transactions and hospitality. God points them forward to a time when they will welcome all the world, gentiles included.

They were not required to dismantle what they had and build something different. They were to start from where they were, and enlarge their capacity to enable new people to join them.

"Enlarge the place of your tent" provides us too with a vision, an imperative, a reality. We need to recognise that we are all called to join in with what God is doing.

Reasons to be confident

Everywhere people are reaching into the corners of our parishes in fresh ways. There are mid-week drop-in cafés for people suffering with poor

mental health and community gardens – to name but two initiatives. Often people begin to develop simple worship in these new church groups. They worship where they are.

Some churches celebrate the unchanging nature of God as they continue with traditional forms of worship, expressing their love for God alongside warmly welcoming newcomers. Others adopt new expressions of worship that engage with and embrace the longing of those in the far reaches of our parishes and communities.

There is a real spiritual hunger within our culture. This became even clearer as we emerged from the pandemic. Many no longer relate to a religious institutional church, and yet are very open to exploring a sense of spiritual longing within different forms and expressions of church. Much is happening simply and naturally, and has been over the past 30 years. It is organic and God-inspired.

We have learned a lot by watching how churches grow – see the top tips for growth opposite. Thankfully, it's not all down to us; all Christian growth starts with God. 🙏

Words: Sarah Flashman, New Congregations Programme Manager

Photo: Shutterstock



See what other churches are doing to grow:
oxford.anglican.org/growing-new-congregations#stories

When to give up

Sometimes it's right to persevere – and sometimes it's better to stop doing what you're doing. But how do you know which is right?

I'm trying not to take it personally that colleagues invited me to write an article about giving up; as it happens, I'm very happy to! We all live with experiences of failure, personal and corporate, and it takes discernment, honesty and courage to let go, bring something to a good end or accept defeat. I also know the double pain of failing to fail well.

Sometimes the hardest things to let go of aren't obvious abject failures, but endeavours that consume all the oxygen, that just survive, that we've given much to, that we're emotionally attached to. We fear the shame of letting go, but we know that there will be no space for new life if we hold on.

Forgive my audacity to suggest it, but I wish there had been a fourth servant in Jesus' parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). Before getting to the fearful talent-burier, this fourth servant gives it a go, tries to invest their talents well, but still loses everything. Consistent with Jesus' post-resurrection healing conversation with Peter by the lakeside, the master would have listened well, tended to their woundedness, and commissioned them to go and try again... maybe fried some fish too.

Why aren't Christians better at letting go or accepting failure? We should be! We know about dark valleys before anointing and banquets, we know about denying ourselves and taking up our cross, we know that Jesus moved on to another town when it wasn't working out as he wanted,

we know his teaching about the seed needing to die before new life springs up. There's a catalogue of shipwrecks, literal and metaphorical, for the early Christians, and at the heart of our faith, it's God that is denied, tormented, tortured, abandoned and dies. We'd love to live in Easter Day permanently, but first and always at the same time, we are a Good Friday people.

Before ordination, I worked for nearly a decade in an alcohol and drug rehabilitation unit for homeless men. We used the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Twelve Steps as a framework for therapy. The Twelve Steps are directly inspired by the teaching of Jesus. The starting point with Step One is a fulsome admittance of failure and turning to God. One of AA's great paradoxical catchphrases is, "We surrender to win".

Although we should be good at letting go and/or accepting failure, I suspect that we Christians struggle because, consciously or unconsciously, we wrongly attribute failure to our poor faith or God's lack of blessing.

All that said, sometimes there are things to fight for and sustain despite all setbacks, and here we need good discernment. In the words of Reinhold Niebuhr's prayer adopted by AA,

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Amen to that! 🙏

*Words: The Revd Paul Cowan, Chaplain to the Bishop of Oxford
Photo: Shutterstock*



If you would appreciate another's guidance about where to focus your attention, talk to someone in your church or a spiritual director:

oxford.anglican.org/spiritual-direction

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.



Intergenerational or age-specific?



Claire Wren is training in Ordained Pioneer Ministry with CMS and Great Western Park Church in Didcot.

“Everyone is welcome” is a phrase we use often. It helps us keep in mind that intergenerational worship is so much more than “doing it for the kids” (to quote Robbie Williams).

Disciples Together was launched across the diocese in 2020, with the aim of putting children, young people and families at the centre of a more Christ-like Church. As we emerged from lockdown, we realised that our church had changed. Households had become accustomed to being all together, all the time. There were many new babies and therefore new parents, who had not had the opportunity to mix with those who were like them, let alone draw on the wisdom (and babysitting favours) of their wider church family. There was a need for us to be together, to enjoy one another’s company, and to rediscover corporate worship.

Our monthly all-age service consists of songs, crafts, video clips, reflective activities, perhaps a talk, certainly plenty of refreshments. There is huge value in experiencing God’s love and acceptance in a heterogeneous

mix of people. Nothing is seen as too babyish, nor too lofty. No one is exposed as lacking in knowledge or “a bit too noisy”. Each worshipper can be caught up in the mystery of faith, however they choose to engage.

“Everyone is welcome”

On other Sundays, there is space for play and an invitation to participate. I make no secret of the fact that my favourite Bible verse is: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3–4). People of all ages are serving in the music group, in hospitality, in welcome, in reading. There is a high tolerance for wandering about, whether to get another coffee or push a toy car among the chairs. The comprehension that our youngest children have of the ebb and flow of morning worship is incredible. Through observation and participation, they know that there is a time for everything; God has set eternity in the human heart (Ecclesiastes 3, NIV).

We have found many benefits of an intergenerational approach. Firstly,

Continues overleaf...

In each edition of *Pathways*, we ask two Christians with different perspectives to explore a topical issue. Claire Wren and Beth Gomm both minister with children in their local churches, but in contrasting ways. We asked them to share their church's approach and why they feel so positive about it.

The church needs children, and children need church. If we want the church to flourish and to see children and young people making a choice to follow Jesus, they need to be a welcomed part of our church family and feel that they have a role to play.

I love being part of a church where there are many families present, where you can see the children grow each week, and they feel part of the larger church family. I love it when you can see whole families worshipping God together. But when I reflect on our ministry time, the time when we are teaching and moving in our faith journey, the most effective approach is age-specific ministry.

I am blessed to be part of a church where we have the volunteers to be able to run age-specific groups. At two of our congregations at Warfield, we are able to run four different children's and youth ministries on a Sunday morning. We have an opportunity (thanks to our awesome volunteer teams) to tailor what we do to the needs of each specific group

“each group looks very different”

so that it is meaningful to them. They can ask the questions that are on their hearts, wherever they are in their faith, and mature at their own pace. This means that each group looks very different. The youngest children run in, excited to hear what Mr Bible has to teach us this week; our youth come together to explore the issues

facing them and how the Bible can give them the strength to face the giants in their lives. To run an intergenerational ministry that would have the same impact every week is difficult to achieve.

Smaller groups also provide an excellent chance to grow in relationships with the children. Seeing the same smaller group means that prayer requests can be followed up easily, and stronger relationships can be built between the children as well as the leaders and helpers.

With one congregation, all age groups from the adults to the pre-school children cover the same topic each week. This has been a great way



Beth Gomm is the Children, Youth and Families Pastor at Warfield Church.

Continues overleaf...

there are many opportunities for playfulness together – and through this we not only learn how to worship with our hearts, minds, soul and strength, but also to love our neighbour as ourselves. (Mark 12:30–31)

No one “grows out of church”. There are no children’s groups for young people to become too old for. Church is a place where we experience gradual maturing within a family rather than the abrupt transitions of the school system.

A third of our congregation is under 16. Worshipping together precludes the need for a team of children’s workers. Those who have the gifts to present the gospel in engaging and creative ways can share their skills with all of us.

Visitors don’t have pressure put upon them to part with their children, and our community has many families who are looking for things to do together at the weekend.

Finally, we have a high degree of participation – everyone is welcome. ¶

of encouraging the whole church family to share what they learnt or what stood out to them each week, and for each individual to share their take on the topic.

However, I believe that there does need to be regular time when the church worships together as a family. Not just a time when the children and young people happen to be there, but a time when we are gathered as the church family to celebrate all the amazing things our God has done and worship him together. Our children need to feel that they are a wanted part of the church, that God loves their songs of joy and praise and listens to their prayers.

God has called us to welcome our children and young people into our churches, to tell of the marvellous deeds he has done and show them how to run the race that is set before us. I think we should meet them where they are, creating an age-specific space for them to share their lives with others and to help them grow to be the disciples God wants them to be. ¶

Further reading

These two approaches to ministry with children and young people are not in opposition. Research models indicate that for the benefit of all, both intergenerational and peer groups have a role (and not just for the children and young people). Both approaches can be used within the same church.

Disciples Together, from the diocese, looks at how to re-engage with children, young people and families in our churches. There is a report and resources to help with ministry with children, plus a discussion starter on how to have these conversations within your own church community:

oxford.anglican.org/disciples-together

A series from Lifelong Faith brings together research on forming faith intergenerationally and theory around the topic.

lifelongfaith.com/insights--practices.html



Our Space Makers for Families pack is a resource to equip caregivers, parents, grandparents and godparents with tools to nurture their own everyday faith and spiritual journey alongside the children and family members with whom they live.

There are five contemplative practices for even the youngest children to complete:

oxford.anglican.org/families

A learning church

Do you want to learn more about being a Christian, explore scripture at a deeper level or understand what God has called you to? A range of online courses are available to complete at your own pace online, or as part of a church small group, with new courses planned for 2024.

It can be tough to figure out exactly what Christians believe and why. It's good to spend time thinking through what you believe and developing confidence in those beliefs as understanding grows. What we think is important, and is the starting point of how we act.

It's also challenging answering questions about faith, what the Bible says, or even sharing our faith with others. We want to see everyone in our churches equipped and released into the mission and ministry that God has called them to.

Our new online learning hub has three pathways to help you grow in everyday faith and become a more confident disciple. Each of the pathways is free and designed to be accessible to everyone.

Bite-sized

Topics at this level take around three hours to complete. Work through topics at your own pace and at a time that suits you. Each section includes a film, questions and something to reflect on.

Going deeper

Courses at this level take around 15 hours to complete. You can learn online at your own pace, or as part of a locally organised group exploring five or six sessions together. You'll discover videos, podcasts, questions and quizzes.

Study groups

A study group course runs across ten units during the course of a term. Pre-registration is required. Courses at this level are accessible to everyone in the church. You'll learn alongside people who are discerning a call to a recognised ministry, attend two study days and weekly online tutorial groups.

We're offering everyone access to the learning hub because we think it will deepen your faith and enrich your life. We're also hoping that even more people will register for Come and See in 2024.

Lent 2024

Come and See takes place in Lent each year. It's our big, warm open invitation to an adventure in faith and trust. It's for everyone in the local church and the whole community... including children and young people, families and schools.

This year we will be looking at the commandments. Everyone who registers will receive a daily short email to reflect on, and a weekly short video from Bishop Steven exploring the themes in a bit more detail. The materials are suitable both for those who are exploring faith for the first time and those with an established faith.

There are many different ways that you and your church can work with Come and See. You can encourage each other to register for the daily emails, you can use the weekly films as part of a talks series, or you can use the dedicated materials for course organisers to offer Come and See to Sunday and small groups.

The Christian life is something that we do together. Who are the people in your church that you can encourage to register for the learning hub so that they are better equipped and released into the ministries God has called them to?

Who are the people who might benefit from the Come and See Lent course? What might you and your church offer?



The Beatitudes

The verses found in Matthew 5:3–12 and Luke 6:20–23 are an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, given by Jesus to his followers as a guide for living a Christian life. The materials are based on a series of six films from Bishop Steven that consider the Beatitudes through a different lens each session. If you would like to, you can also join an online discussion forum to reflect on the topic.



Five Marks of Mission

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ. Across the world, Christians believe this is seen when Christians demonstrate five 'marks' of mission. Explore what it means to proclaim the good news of the kingdom; teach, baptise and nurture new believers; respond to human need by loving service; transform unjust structures of society; and strive to safeguard the integrity of creation.



Study Groups (pre-registration)

Our study groups are an opportunity to learn alongside others. Each group requires a time commitment of around 40 hours, but much of this is self-paced using online materials. Our study groups for 2024 are Opening up the Bible (spring term), Everyday Discipleship (summer term) and Mission and Evangelism (autumn term). Limited spaces are available for each group.



Story of scripture

The story of the Bible is fundamentally about how God created us, how things have gone wrong, and how God faithfully throughout human history has called people back into relationship with him. This topic explores the overarching story the Bible tells so that when you read the different books of the Bible, you know where they fit into the story of God, people and creation.

COME AND SEE

Come and See: the commandments

In three of the four gospels, Jesus is asked which commandment is the most important. He answers not with one commandment but with two: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself. Come and See this Lent shows how these two commandments can give a rhythm and a shape to our lives.

Explore the learning hub and register online:
learn.oxford.anglican.org

Receive daily Come and See emails:
oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

Explore other discipleship resources:
oxford.anglican.org/discipleship-resources

Spiritual abuse

People come to the church looking for the healing, love and acceptance that we know God promises them. It is our job to maintain a healthy culture which honours that trust and hope.

Over the last few years we've seen more recognition and understanding of spiritual abuse. For those unfamiliar with the term, it's "a form of emotional and psychological abuse, characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context."¹

That can't happen in a church context, surely?... Well, yes, just like every place where there are humans, things do go wrong on occasion. By thinking of everyone's behaviour occurring along a spectrum, we can begin to consider where there are unhealthy habits or cultures.

At one end of the spectrum are the behaviours demonstrated within churches that have created healthy cultures where people can flourish and grow in their faith. In these environments people feel empowered and included, able to give feedback to leaders and discussion is encouraged. The church leadership will be aware of power dynamics, be open to learning and operate with humility. Spiritual abuse is unlikely to occur.

However, if a church culture is unhealthy, there may be attempts to control other people, shaming or putting pressure on them to conform by misuse of scripture or "God-given" authority. At its worst, people are badly damaged and manipulation and tactics to intimidate can lead to fear of challenging church leadership or raising concerns.

What about strong Christian teaching from the pulpit, or in our family home? There are many good things we learn from scripture. But at the unhealthy end of the spectrum, the rich imagery

and languages of scripture can be misapplied to coerce behaviour, require unquestioning obedience, or exert pressure to conform.

For example, in a domestic situation, an abuser might use the Old Testament to say, "This is always the man's role, and this is always the woman's role" in a way that is oppressive, or use a "Biblical justification" for sex, even when the spouse declines.

In a church people could be told that if they do not behave in a certain way or believe certain things then God may punish them. A leader could suggest they have divine authority which cannot be questioned. If people do not conform they could find themselves less involved in the church.

These examples are abusive, no less difficult to endure than other types of abuse.

Thankfully, our churches, clergy and leadership teams across this diocese are committed to creating healthy cultures where all can experience God's love and grace. That means space and respect for dissenting opinions, a PCC that supports and challenges ministry and addresses complaints.

But we must remain vigilant. Anyone can experience spiritual abuse, including clergy. If you are concerned about spiritual abuse within a church community or domestic setting, contact the diocesan Safeguarding team. 📞

Words: Dr Louise Whitehead and Steven Buckley

¹ *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse*, Oakley and Humphreys, 2019

Reflection

Proverbs 31:8 calls us to “Speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable.” How is that at the heart of your mission and ministry?

Responding well

Responding well to a disclosure includes active listening, understanding and empathy, taking the disclosure seriously, not minimising the story or blaming the individual.

Online learning

Safeguarding is everybody’s responsibility. Why not take an hour to complete basic awareness training online? Register at safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org

When to report

If you have received a disclosure, have a concern, or worry about someone then you must report it to diocesan safeguarding. But **if someone is in immediate danger dial 999.**

Support for victims

Anyone who comes forward to disclose church-based abuse will be listened to with compassion and humanity. Find out more at oxford.anglican.org/survivors

Diocesan safeguarding

If there is no risk of immediate harm, call 01865 208 295 during office hours. Outside office hours call 0303 003 1111
oxford.anglican.org/safeguarding

Psalm 27 is a profound reflection for a fragile church in a fragile world. The psalm draws us deeply into our relationship with God and ends with a resolution to wait and trust in times of challenge and difficulty.

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear? ♦
The Lord is the strength of my life;
of whom then shall I be afraid?

2 When the wicked, even my enemies and
my foes, came upon me to eat up my
flesh, ♦
they stumbled and fell.

3 Though a host encamp against me,
my heart shall not be afraid, ♦
and though there rise up war against
me, yet will I put my trust in him.

4 One thing have I asked of the Lord
and that alone I seek: ♦
that I may dwell in the house of the
Lord all the days of my life,

5 To behold the fair beauty of the Lord ♦
and to seek his will in his temple.

6 For in the day of trouble he shall hide
me in his shelter; ♦
in the secret place of his dwelling shall
he hide me and set me high upon a
rock.

7 And now shall he lift up my head ♦
above my enemies round about me;

8 Therefore will I offer in his dwelling an
oblation with great gladness; ♦
I will sing and make music to the Lord.

9 Hear my voice, O Lord, when I call; ♦
have mercy upon me and answer me.

10 My heart tells of your word, 'Seek my
face.' ♦
Your face, Lord, will I seek.

11 Hide not your face from me, ♦
nor cast your servant away in
displeasure.

12 You have been my helper; ♦
leave me not, neither forsake me, O
God of my salvation.

13 Though my father and my mother
forsake me, ♦
the Lord will take me up.

14 Teach me your way, O Lord; ♦
lead me on a level path, because of
those who lie in wait for me.

15 Deliver me not into the will of my
adversaries, ♦
for false witnesses have risen up
against me, and those who breathe out
violence.

16 I believe that I shall see the goodness
of the Lord ♦
in the land of the living.

17 Wait for the Lord; be strong and he
shall comfort your heart; ♦
wait patiently for the Lord.

Dwelling in the Word

Children of all ages can and do encounter God. John the Baptist leapt for joy in his mother's womb when the Christ-child (also in his mother's womb) came near. So how can families create a space to explore scripture together?

Dwelling is the practice of loitering in God's word, allowing it to dwell in us as we dwell in it. We are invited to choose words or phrases in a story, psalm or piece of scripture that catch our attention, cause us to question, or with which there is a personal connection.

This is a safe and calm space, where everyone can take the risk of waiting, noticing and wondering. Each person is then invited to listen to another person and share what caught their own attention. Listening and being listened to helps us grow in our connection with God, self and others.

Be thoughtful about the Bible translation you use. We recommend the Contemporary English Version as it is accessible to a wide range of ages and abilities. If you have younger children and use a storybook version of the Bible, ensure that it tells God's story with truth and integrity.

Here's how to give it a go as a family. Choose a story, psalm or Bible passage – you can find suggestions at oxford.anglican.org/families

Invite the children to "get rid of their wiggles" (if they're small) or to come and sit or lie down. Ask everyone to listen carefully and notice which part of the story – a word, phrase or a question that comes to mind – grabs their attention, that they like the best or that they can't stop thinking about.

Pause and then begin the story. Pause at the end and then ask another person to read or tell the story for a second time. After that, spend a few moments quietly thinking about the story.

When everyone is ready, each person can share what they noticed or liked best. Try not to answer questions, explaining the meaning of the text or "fixing" problems. Simply respond with affirming statements and, if necessary, wondering or open questions.

The key thing is to allow conversation to emerge. Here are some wondering questions you can ask:

"I wonder which bit of the story you liked best?"

"I wonder if this story reminds you of another story, psalm or verse from the Bible?"

"I wonder why Jesus did/said that?"

When everyone who would like to has shared, pray about the "noticings" and "wonderings". Following your prayers, keep being quiet so that you can receive from God.

Dwelling in the Word can take practice, so don't give up too soon. Getting to know God depends on us spending time dwelling in (rather than just reading) God's story. Don't worry about repetition! Receive it as a gift and pray for insight. ¶

Words: This is an edited extract from Space Makers for Families.



Space Makers equips families with the tools to nurture everyday faith and daily contemplative practices:
oxford.anglican.org/families

For the people of the Holy Land

For the wounded,
and those facing a lifetime of scars,
for those desperately seeking medical treatment
where there is none;
Lord, have mercy.

For medical and emergency personnel,
risking their own lives
to save those of others;
Lord, have mercy.

For those who cannot see anything but rage and violence,
that you would surprise them with mercy,
and turn their hearts towards kindness
for their fellow human beings;
Lord have mercy.

Mighty and caring God,
you promised that, one day,
swords will be beaten into ploughshares,
meet us in our distress
and bring peace upon this troubled land.

Amen

As Christians our first action in the face of war, terror and hatred is to pray daily to the God of justice, mercy and peace. Father, hear our prayers.

Prayer: The Most Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

Photo: Smoke and flames billow from a high-rise tower in Gaza City. Source: Wafa

My gran modelled by example



Emma's early experience of church was not good – she was thrown out of Sunday school! She kept questioning the facts, but her questions were too

big for that Sunday school. How did Genesis and evolution go together?

Yet her grandmother revealed there was more to discover about God. She started and ended each day in prayer. The way she lived showed Emma that a relationship with God is part of life.

"Because my gran just lived this faith, I couldn't understand how what I was being taught fitted with what I knew of life. The simple Bible stories were too simple. They didn't work for me. I got more and more frustrated with church, but kept very close to God."

As Emma grew older, she went to youth groups run by churches. Her approach to prayer was different to theirs – she prayed in private, chatting to God. She didn't connect with what she encountered. Yet the church taught her social justice and she enjoyed charity fundraising.

Her grandmother continued to inspire. In her 80s she would visit elderly people, take flowers and jam, help clean. She would always say, "Hello, I'm Margaret Wyley from the church down the road."

"She never told me what to do. She modelled by example... God flows through that."

When her grandmother died, she felt really connected to God at the funeral. "At those events – christenings, weddings, funerals – I connected with churches. They were positive experiences, very moving."

The years passed and Emma married. She did not attend church regularly. After a while, family life became traumatic. Four boys died before birth. When a fifth child was expected, Emma had a strong feeling that she had to go to church. "I needed to be in a community of people and to bring [my daughter] up with that. It mattered. It was God at work. It was one of those things you can't explain."

After visiting a couple of churches, Emma discovered St Nicolas and immediately thought "This is it." It had a sense of calm. She went to a service and was warmly welcomed – "everything I'd never experienced."

That was the beginning of a new stage in her faith. Years later, the day Emma became a Licensed Lay Minister, she returned to her grandmother's church. Her grandmother wanted people to know they were loved, and for her that was all about God's love. Emma's ministry was to start there too. ¶

As told to Pathways by Emma Major, Licensed Lay Minister at St Nicolas, Earley.



Children and young people's groups have changed a lot since Emma was a child. Search for Disciples Together on the website to find out how they're changing again. And if you're interested in exploring lay ministry for yourself, visit oxford.anglican.org/lay-ministry



The Way of Love

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

The way of love is the way of life.
Come and See this Lent.

oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see